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'Glorious Years' Ahead for Children's Books

Marc Cheshire
Editorial Director,
Books for Young Readers,
Henry Holt & Co.

The reason children's book sales have increased is the mini-baby boom of the last five years. The kids of the first baby boom generation are having kids of their own. These parents are the most highly educated generation of Americans, and they understand the importance of knowing how to read. They want to take an active role in their children's education and are willing to spend money on that—that includes buying them good books. At the moment they've been buying a lot of preschool books, but as those kids get older we'll see a lot of demand for easy readers and middle grade books. In bookstores that demand is going to be for paperbacks.

I think we'll also see increased competition among publishers. New companies will enter the children's book market, but a lot of those people will enter for the wrong reasons: they're reading the statistics but don't know enough about the children's book business to make it work. What's really selling today is quality, and the decision on the part of the bookstore buyer and the parent has to do with whether the books are good or not, more than their price or format.

Walter Lorraine
Vice-President and Director,
Children's Trade Books,
Houghton Mifflin

The next five years will be glorious years for readers of children's books, publishers, librarians, booksellers and teachers alike. And it's been a long time in coming. Parents will have more direct access to the quality books that are being published for young readers, through the retail outlets, and perhaps further down the line, through the classrooms. It seems evident that reading in the schools is intensifying a focus on literature, rather than just on skills. We'll still do books for the library market, but now the audience has broadened and we're bringing parents more directly into the equation, without losing one whit of the high quality of content that librarians have always demanded.

Some key industry figures
share their (mostly
optimistic) views of the
future market in a special
PW Survey

Liz Gordon
Vice-President and Publisher,
Harper Junior Books Group

You can't look at the marketplace and at publishing without looking at cultural factors. Parents these days are better educated, have more disposable income, fewer children to spend that income on, and the desire to see their children do well educationally. In this sophisticated marketplace, that still doesn't mean people will go into a bookstore and buy hardcovers in quantity. They will buy paperbacks if they think the quality is there. But the key to publishing paperbacks is having a superb hardcover publishing program. You have to make an investment in a long-term process. In order to publish quality books, a publisher must take the long view and look for true writers, not books that capitalize on short-term trends. Publishing books that will still be here 10 years from now is profitable for a publisher, and it also happens to be the way I like to publish.

George Nicholson
Vice-President and Editorial
Director, Books for Young Readers,
Dell/Delacorte

The sales reps are telling us no more series, that the buyers don't want them. Whether the kids want them is another question. The big series seem to be holding, though there's been nothing new that's caught anyone's imagination. The real question is, can a publisher launch, at considerable expense, a new series at X number of books a month for two or three years? It's a massive expenditure even if you completely trust your sales force.

The toughest problem that paperback houses face is determining who we are. We're all very different from each other. And the hardcover

houses have to determine what they want to do—they can't reach potential growth areas in YA, which are in nonbook outlets. We haven't begun to realize potential sales in those outlets. Most of us have fairly modest return rates, and we've been afraid to let returns rise. But there's also the line of argument that we haven't been adventurous enough. Finally, as hardcover houses pull back their standard backlist titles, paperback houses will become more aggressive about acquiring established authors.

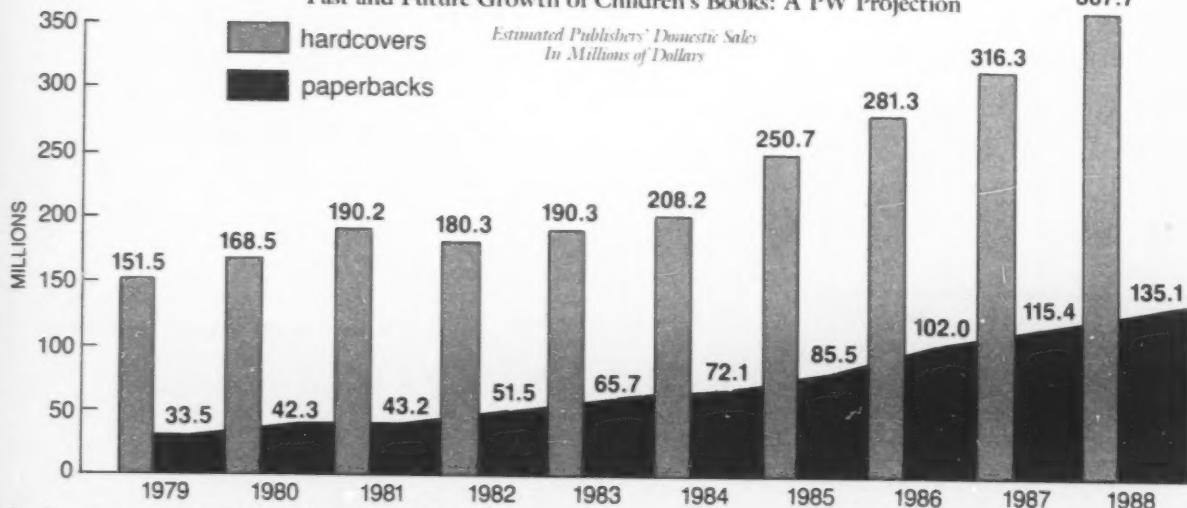
Bruno Quinson
President, General Books
Division, Macmillan

We feel that for the next 5 to 10 years, children's books are a growth market. We're doing seven times the business we were four years ago, and have no plans to cut back on children's books. And we see three areas for growth. First, we plan to grow in the traditional hardcover publishing area, with new picture books for both the library and bookstore market, as well as bring back some of the wonderful backlist books that may be out of print. Next, we'll continue our aggressive paperback programs. And finally, we're gearing toward publishing more toward bookstores. Our traditional business—the library market—is very important to us and we'll continue to publish for it, but the retail market has become very important as well. More and more working parents have children but have less time to spend with them, and those parents want to buy books that are both educational and fun, to read to them at night. We're going after that market.

John Keller
Publisher, Children's Books,
Little, Brown & Co.

We're never going to say goodbye to board books and cloth books, but big-ticket items are going to come increasingly to the fore. Lavish retail picture books with the right names of authors and artists will succeed, and there will be more of them. I think people are no longer afraid to part with a buck—the shock of the prices has worn off. If you're paying \$12 for a 32-page picture book and you can get a 96-page collection of terrific po-

Past and Future Growth of Children's Books: A PW Projection



Data Source: American Association of Publishers/Forecast: Cahners Economics

ems with great pictures for \$20, I think people are ready to take that plunge.

I see a pretty healthy children's book picture over the next five years. If there is such a thing as straight institutional books (though there's less of that than ever before), even they will benefit from this. What's good for retail will also be good for the institutional market.

Jean Feiwel
Editor-in-Chief and Divisional Vice-President, Scholastic

The reprint business, as it used to be, has fallen away almost completely, as hardcover houses retrieve the rights to books they once sold. This has significant impact on not only our backlist but also our frontlist. It causes me to look more aggressively for hardcover authors we also can publish in paperback. And we have to find new talent and begin to develop those people we see as the future of the children's book world.

We want to become full-line publishers and do every kind of book for every marketplace we publish to. I see competition in every area: the hardcover business—which we're new to—trade paperbacks, the book clubs. Younger and middle readers can be hot at the moment, where the aggressive acquiring is going on, but I have to keep my eye on the ball in other areas. I feel like our publishing programs at Scholastic cover all the ages, and if I let one go I'll leave a flank exposed across the market where someone else could make inroads.

John Briggs
President, Holiday House

The most exciting part of this big renaissance in children's publishing has been in the public's recognition of the value of good children's books, and we're publishing with the expectation that this will continue. We're

going to continue to do quality but not elitist books for a market we think will keep on growing. We'll do more classic but also more innovative picture books compared with the past. We'll also publish more fiction for middle and older readers than we have, more nonfiction for all ages, and we'll continue to publish Judaica and poetry.

David Allender
Editorial Director,
Crown Books for Young Readers

Children's books will become bigger and bigger business. The key question is whether we can rise to this occasion by creating increasingly excellent and truly original books. A similar sales boom in the '50s and '60s led to a revolution of quality that is still with us. Now it's our turn.

Stephen Roxburgh
Vice-President and Publisher,
Books for Young Readers,
Farrar, Straus & Giroux

The biggest development I see is in full-color picture books in trade paperback. We're seeing very high quality production standards at higher than mass market prices, and we're doing very well with it.

What we'll continue to see is aggressive retail as opposed to institutional marketing of lists by trade publishers. More and more publishers will be doing the kinds of things paperback publishers have been doing forever. We're not going to ignore the library market but we have to find other outlets.

I'm delighted with the renewal of interest in historical or period fiction. Genre books have peaked and now reprints and trade houses are discovering that they can publish what may have been out of style 10 years ago. The sad news is that YA hardcover fiction is in the worst shape it's ever been. It may be that the most appro-

priate form for the genre is in paperback. Except for writers who are well established, it's quite difficult to take on new hardcover YA fiction, especially if it's of a serious subject nature. I find that very sad because we're quite committed to that form.

Betsy Gould
Associate Publisher,
Bantam Books for Young Readers
and Young Adults

I believe that the series boom is going to level off. Publishers have competed against each other to such an extent that we've probably sped that along. At Bantam, we'll be concentrating on developing our backlist, for all ages. We'll be doing hardcover originals. We have our first group of book-and-tape packages coming out. We'll also be launching a line for toddlers and preschoolers, though that area too is becoming very competitive. We'll be taking those books beyond the traditional bookstore—to toy stores, convenience stores, some of the big merchandisers. And we're expanding our continuity program to the supermarkets.

Christopher Franceschelli
Vice-President and Publisher,
Dutton Children's Books (as of March 1)

Marketing of children's books will become increasingly savvy—much more refined than just large sums of money committed to chain catalogue ads. In no small measure, that is due to the independent booksellers, who are playing an ever more important role, displaying a professionalism and knowledgeability that we once expected only from librarians.

Though it has become increasingly vital for publishers to integrate vertically, many publishers may need to rethink some of the policies that caused a rush into trade/mass market publishing. That's not to say that it can't be done successfully, only

'For the next five to 10 years children's books are a growth market. We're doing seven times the business we were four years ago'

Bruno Quinson

that the practices of trade publishing aren't necessarily applicable to mass market, and vice versa.

I believe that there is a real future to nonfiction publishing in the trade. We as an industry have been guilty of fulfilling our own prophecy that nonfiction doesn't sell, by all too often packaging books to look like relics of the '50s. Presented correctly, nonfiction books have every bit of the appeal of picture books.

Doris Duenewald
Publisher, Golden Books

I think we'll see more back-to-basics—good stuff that will make good backlist books. Recently so many of the licensed books have not been successful that publishers are getting wary. We'll be doing fewer than before. When you have so much emphasis on licensing and frontlist, when you're putting so much money into it, there's a tendency to let the backlist slip a little. We'll see more emphasis on math and science books. There's a bit of a dinosaur craze going on, which is amusing because dinosaur books have always sold extremely well. And the market for books for the very young has gotten so full that we'll start seeing more books for the six-to-nine age level.

Dorothy Briley
Editor-in-Chief, Lothrop,
Lee & Shepard; Vice-President,
William Morrow and Co.

The demand for books to share with infants and toddlers is not apt to slow down. Added to this market or the extension of it are those educated and discriminating parents whose children are more than six years old. I see a trend toward beautifully and well-produced nonfiction. We should also remember that many of these carefully nurtured children will be bookstore customers sooner rather than later. The nine- or 10-year-old child as customer will be a new experience for publishers and booksellers accustomed to having adults choose the majority of books for children. We should be prepared for the possibility that young customers may say no to some books that adults would choose for them, and yes to others that adults would doubt that a child could understand or enjoy.

Edward Davis
Vice-President and Managing
Director, Simon & Schuster
Juvenile Division

Clearly we're in an expanding market. I'm seeing a lot less price resistance from the wholesalers than a year ago, and that will continue. Parents are starting to look at a children's book as a bargain. They won't balk at the price if the book delivers.

But we have to be careful not to say that if the market is rosy for children's books, that means anything will sell. Stores are being very selective and the customers are too. I see very little future for gimmick and novelty books that don't deliver more than just gimmicks and novelty.

Regina Hayes
Vice-President and Editorial
Director, Viking Penguin
Children's Books

While I hope we can always be commercial and pick up some of the trends kids want, it's necessary to remember the importance of good art direction and editorial strength. If you have that strength you can use material in a million different ways. And if you don't have a core of first-rate material, you have nothing to work with. We keep coming back to the issue of quality. It doesn't mean you can't do something timely and topical and commercial, but we're still drawing on those books like *Ferdinand* and *Madeline* from 50 years ago, and we hope we'll have books like those 50 years down the road.

Sandra Jordan
Editor-in-Chief, Orchard Books

I think that picture books will continue to hold preeminence in stores because of their immediate appeal. You don't need a review to choose a picture book. But the market is saturated with books that promise more than they deliver, and there's a growing demand that the contents of the book match the beauty.

Beyond that, humorous middle grade fiction, poetry, handsomely produced nonfiction, historical novels and picture books with strong texts all look like strong areas for the next few years. Above all, it seems to me that people are tired of flashy books and TV tie-ins, and are interested in quality. That's always been at the heart of the children's book industry; good books are good business.

Gerald Harrison
Executive Vice-President,
Juvenile Division, Random House

We're seeing that frontlist is more important than ever before. Creating new backlist is very, very hard. You want more than one year's life out of

'The market is saturated with books that promise more than they deliver, and there's a growing demand that the contents of the book match the beauty'

Sandra Jordan

a book and that's hard. The business is much more competitive than it was a few years ago. Every time a publisher is successful with one line of books, five others come in and do the same thing. It's harder to establish a new title and a new author. On the good side, children's books are much more widely available these days. We're selling more books in more places than ever before.

Rubin Pfeffer
Editor-in-Chief, Trade Department,
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich

Since 1984 we've doubled the amount of books we publish for children. We are attempting to do books that are lower priced so that they can get into a wider market. We'll be relaunching our Voyager paperback line, and reissuing picture books and novels in paperback. There's a new market for the classics, and we're updating the packaging to meet new tastes. We'll do more than we used to in terms of simultaneous publishing, in response to both the library and the bookstore markets.

Margaret Frith
Senior Vice-President and Publisher,
Putnam Young Readers Group

As children's books have come into their own, and as publishers who have not been in the business before continue to dive in, I see the next five years as strong and successful for those who understand what a good book is, and who publish quality books with lasting child appeal. Along with publishing the best for children, one must have a committed sales and marketing department capable of reaching wider markets. At Putnam, we now have a unique opportunity for cross-marketing our books with a range of child-related products, with the acquisition of Family Line and American Publishing. We can get books into areas we haven't been in before, or areas we haven't been in as deeply as we'd like. Ten years ago we were strictly a children's book division of Putnam's; we still are, but the opportunity of getting our books to a wider audience of children has never been better.

—DIANE ROBACK